

# COMMENTARY

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SECTION C

## Military Mission Over: End The Occupation

**P**resident Bush frames the nation's strategy in Iraq simply as staying the course and hoping for a better result. Staying the course is not a strategy or an objective, it is a slogan. By staying the

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course, as Harvard professor and author Graham Allison writes, the "occupation has diverted essential resources from the fight against al-Qaida, allowed the Taliban to regroup in Afghanistan, fostered neglect of the Iranian nuclear threat, undermined alliances critical to preventing terrorism, devastated America's standing with every country in Europe and destroyed it in the Muslim world."

Rather than blindly continuing on this course, what the nation and our troops need now from the administration and Congress is a clearly defined blueprint that lays out the objectives of their mission and provides a plan to bring them home safely, securely and soon.

In July 2004, I proposed the strategic withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq by December 2005. I outlined a

five-point plan for a path forward in Iraq that included ending the occupation, redirecting our efforts to capturing Osama bin Laden, combating the root causes of terrorism, aggressively pursuing energy independence and bringing the leaders of the world's religions together to ecumenically address the futility of terrorism. Almost a year and a half later, I remain convinced that this plan was right then and is right now.

By March 2006, we will have been in Iraq for three years. The military phase of this operation is over. Our troops have performed admirably and with resounding success, and their military mission has been accomplished. Gen. George Casey, the commander of our forces in Iraq, recently said that our continued military presence "fuels the insurgency" and only "extends the amount of time that it will take for Iraqi security forces to become self-reliant."

Iraq must move to political stabilization. Both the passage of the new constitution in a nationwide referendum and the National Assembly elections are important steps in Iraq's self-determination. For democracy to succeed, the Iraqi people must want it as badly for themselves as we want it

for them. The Iraqi government, however, will never stand on its own as long as we remain there.

The president and Congress now owe these brave men and women a path forward from the ill-defined policies and mistakes that have left our military at a breaking point. That remedy is the strategic, tactical and secure withdrawal of our forces from Iraq beginning immediately — preferably no later than Thanksgiving — starting with the soldiers who make up the overextended National Guard and the Reserves currently serving there.

This drawdown should be completed by Easter, allowing our citizen soldiers to return to their vital homeland security role. Our remaining active and Special Forces would then focus on the continued training of Iraqi troops. This should be sped up by training out of theater and in cooperation with NATO. As Iraqi forces take over security functions in their nation, our active and Special Forces personnel can be strategically redeployed to other vital national security functions while our political, economic and diplomatic resources continue to aid the Iraqi people.

The unfortunate truth is that the

lack of debate and oversight in Congress, both leading up to the war and in the occupation, has created a quagmire.

As former Sen. Sam Nunn points out in the docudrama "Last Best Chance," we have failed to secure the loose nuclear materials that can be used by terrorists for a dirty bomb. "We are in a race between catastrophe and cooperation," he says, and cannot let vital resources be needlessly diverted. The sooner we can bring an end to this occupation, the sooner we can redirect our resources and refocus on critical national security needs such as this.

Increasingly, Americans rightly wonder how our nation finds itself in this situation. In Shakespeare's Julius Caesar, Cassius says of the Roman leader, "I know he would not be a wolf, but that he sees the Romans are but sheep." One look at the present situation in Iraq forces us to ask if this administration would be a wolf if the Congress were not a lamb.

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